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LETTERS AND CONTRACTS FROM ERECH WRITTEN IN THE NEO-BABYLONIAN PERIOD. CLARENCE ELWOOD KEISER, Ph.D. (*Babylonian Inscriptions in the Collection of James B. Nies, Vol. I*). Yale University Press. 1918. Pp. 42. Plates 60.

Before the great war students of the civilization of the Ancient Orient were accustomed to look to such institutions as the British Museum, the Berlin Museum, and the Louvre for publications of cuneiform texts. Since 1914 Europe has been compelled to suspend, for the time being, many of her operations along purely literary lines. But, thanks to the foresight of such institutions as the Philadelphia Museum, Yale University, and the Harvard Semitic Museum, as well as to that of such individuals as the late J. Pierpont Morgan and the Rev. Dr. J. B. Nies, America has been enabled to step in and to count it a privilege and duty to take up the task which Europe has so well done in the past, and to sow, as she did, that herself and others may reap. The volume at present before us is a sample of the thorough and efficient way in which our scholars are assuming their obligations.

Dr. Keiser's book is the first volume in a series which proposes to publish the "Babylonian Inscriptions in the Collection of James B. Nies," and Dr. Keiser himself is one of that school of young Assyriologists which Professor Clay of Yale University has founded and is developing. American scholarship expects much of these young men, and there are signs that it will not be disappointed. This work of one of Professor Clay's students contains forty-two pages of introductory matter and sixty autographed plates. It is a pity that photographs of a few of the tablets are not included, for they would serve to give the student a better idea of the tablets under consideration than much explanation could do.

In this volume one hundred and seventy-seven texts are published. They consist of letters and contracts from Erech, the ancient Uruk, written in the Neo-Babylonian period. There are ninety-four letters, thirty-six legal documents, and forty-seven temple administrative records. The letters are legible only in part, but the contracts are well preserved. The chief value of these texts is philological, but they contain in addition much material valuable for a study of the social, commercial, and administrative institutions of the Neo-Babylonian empire. There are records of debts, taxes, rents, and mortgages; of exchange, interest, leases, sales, payments, and receipts; there are records of notes promissory and of slaves, of lists of witnesses and balances of accounts, of sheep bought for sacrifice and of taxes to be paid by women. No. 67 contains a request that wine be sent to the sun-god Shamash for sacrifices; Nos. 18, 34, 62, and 93 refer to

the common oriental custom of covenanting with salt; and No. 167 has reference to the observance of a day something like the Hebrew Sabbath.

Both the letters and contracts contain much material useful in the study of the Neo-Babylonian cult. The relation and rank of the many temple officials is a subject which will derive much light from a study of these texts. This is especially true of a class of temple servants called *širaqu*. They were marked or branded with a star (MUL), similar to that placed upon animals, and may have been dedicated to a god.

The primary object of this series being to present only the texts with indices to scholars, no translations have been made, but the indices contain valuable material. First, there is an index of personal names, with more or less full references (such references should be complete, *e.g.*, there is no reference under *Na-din* to No. 18); and then a catalogue of the letters, giving the names of the addresser and addressee; and one of the contracts, giving the date and contents.

The autographed work is splendidly done, but it is a pity that so many printer's errors were allowed to remain in the brief introductory remarks, *e.g.*, "egible" for "legible," "convenanting" for "covenanting"; and in proper names the *dingir* is often omitted when the sign appears in the plates, *e.g.*, p. 37, No. 18. This is a serious error, for students of Babylonian religion are very much concerned with the use of this title. Without the original tablets or a photographed copy it is impossible to check up the accuracy of the copying, but there are some forms which appear questionable, especially in Nos. 93 and 169. But on the whole the copying seems to have been very carefully done.

Assyriologists will look with interest for the succeeding volumes of this series.

SAMUEL A. B. MERCER.

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#### SHORT NOTICES

THE VITAL ISSUES OF THE WAR. RICHARD W. BOYNTON. The Beacon Press. 1918. Pp. x, 134. \$1.00.

A volume of eight sermons, endeavoring to clarify the leading moral issues of the war for busy people. The titles of some of the sermons will indicate the scope of the book: "The War and the Social Revolution," "The Influence of Sea Power in War," "America's Leadership in the World of Tomorrow," "The United States of Europe."